

First security forces home from desert

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Patrick Grady is wearing his Armed Forces Expeditionary Expeditionary medal with glowing pride. Patrick may even take the blue and yellow ribbon to "Show and Tell" at kindergarten.

Along with a hug that swept him off the ground, six-year-old Patrick was pinned with the Expeditionary Medal by his dad, SMSgt. Michael Grady, who came home last week from an Iraqi Freedom desert air base. Patrick almost dropped his "Welcome Home Daddy" sign.

Grady, who served six months at the air base, came home to a Westover welcome with fellow 439th Security Forces Squadron members TSgt. Christopher Mazzey and SSgt. John Shepard. TSgt. Michael Serrichio and SSgt. Joseph Wilkinson had come home earlier from serving with the security forces at the desert base in the AOR. Last week's celebration of the return home of the three security specialists was filmed for the local news by both Springfield television stations, 22 and 40.

The Westover security police served with the 363rd Expeditionary SFS providing security at the housing area known as Coalition Complex, and the air field operations area,

located a number of miles away. The housing compound is surrounded by fence topped by concertina wire and wooden watchtowers staffed by security police.

The security specialists patrolled the desert in two- and four-member fire teams in "up-armored" Humvees, with additional armor and a mounted M-60.

Grady described the patrols as "just like driving on the moon." There are very few landmarks to find your way and the security police wore night vision goggles. During the winter months the temperature dropped fast at night, making it cold enough to need gloves. Desert foxes - tiny and tan - scorpions and camel spiders are part of the landscape.

Grady served as a flight sergeant, conducting an 11 p.m. guard mount each night. Shepard worked with him. Mazzey was responsible for checking on the effectiveness and reinforcing physical security, such as jersey barriers and concertina wire. Others duties of the security forces were bus escort, patrolling the fence line and guarding storage areas and assets in the air field operations area.

The air operations included F-15 and F-16 and RAF Tornados. Also serving at the base were airmen of the Royal Australian Air Force and French Air Force. When the Patriot Wing security police arrived in November the expeditionary force was conducting Southern Watch operations. Their arrival coincided with a dramatic surge in flying operations. The population of the base doubled and people lived three members to a room, with two sharing a bunk bed.

"We watched the base evolve from Southern Watch into Iraqi Freedom in a very short period of time. There were more planes, more equipment. They built a tent city. All branches of the military were represented there in huge numbers," Grady said.

"Planes were taking off loaded with munitions and coming back empty. There were more sorties, more munitions movement," he said.

Reserve and Guard members made up about 70 percent of the security force. The slogan at the base was One Team, One Fight.

The active duty administration in the squadron appreciated the experience that the Reserve and Guard members brought to the team. Grady is a Massachusetts environmental police officer, Mazzey is a New York City police officer and Shepard is a police officer in New Hampton, N.H.

The security police were activated shortly after the 9/11 attacks. Grady and Shepard previously served three months overseas on Enduring Freedom missions.

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Star spangled day



Army Pvt. Robert Minnich of New Jersey (top) comes home to a heartfelt welcome from his wife, Brooke, seven months pregnant, upon his return from the Iraqi Freedom AOR with an accidental injury. Westover volunteer Margaret Cote (below) has a big hug for another soldier who walked on the red carpet at the Westover Passenger Terminal.

--photos by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Lights, camera, action!

We're going to be in the movies.

The Air Force News Service last week sent a reporter here to make a video record of air bridge activities on base. SSgt. Bill Scherer, who is also a producer for the San Antonio, Texas based AF News, spent parts of two days here taking video. He recorded a Westover welcome of troops returning from the Iraqi Freedom AOR, maintenance people on the flight line, aerial porters at work and more.

Scherer was here as part of a swing through the area, including the KC-135 aerial refueling operations out of Bangor IAO and Pease ANGB.

The video he shot is expected to air in June. It will be distributed on VCR cassettes Air Force wide and will also be distributed to local cable stations nationwide as part of the Air Force Television News Service.

The reporter was impressed by what he saw here. "I'm amazed at the level of activity going on at Westover. I've never seen so many C-5s on the ground in one place. I hope to return on a regular basis," Scherer said.

Security in desert... (cont. page 1)

Because the base is large and well established, living conditions were better than for most others in the Iraqi Freedom AOR. Four dining halls offered hot meals 24 hours a day. A learning resource center offered a library, computers and self-help programs from stress control classes to yoga and CLEP testing. Mazzey took advantage of the opportunities to complete his bachelor's degree in criminal justice at the desert base.

Entertainment included country and western, Latin and other dance nights, a first class gym, a large swimming pool and a Burger King, which was located in a trailer.

On the down side, there was no opportunity to leave the area of Coalition Complex and the air field during the six months. Outside the fence of Coalition Complex you could see lights at night but only flat desert landscape during the day. Between the complex and air field, palm trees along the roads were watered by underground irrigation pipes. The monotonous brown/tan color of everything – buildings, uniforms and sand – soon made everyone wish to see the colors of New England and the civilian world.

On the base, broken stone was laid out around buildings in place of grass. The only thing growing in the soil of Coalition Complex was a single, hardy shrub that was nurtured and watered every day by a group of sailors. "Fred," they called the courageous foot-tall plant.

Humor and flexibility got people through the day. "People tend to tolerate more than at home. You have to have a thick skin. There's a lot of people working together in close proximity," Grady said.

He most missed the simple things in life, small children, grass, trees, Grady said. He missed six months of holidays and his son's birthday and the great Italian cooking of his wife, Concetta.

Iraqi Freedom meant sacrifice, but what the security police brought home from the AOR was something they will always keep with them.

"The thing that was amazing was watching so many people come together, all branches of the military, for the common good. There was a lot of sacrifice. But, I'll be able to look back and say I was there for it," Grady said.

PATRIOT express

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using last names of deploying reservists.)

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Airman comes here for red carpet "first"

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

SSgt. John Pomilia of the Alabama Air Guard has deployed from Iceland to Mogadishu and seen a lot of things, but he had to come to New England for one "first time" experience. When he got off the bus at the Westover Passenger Terminal it was the first time in years of worldwide deployments that he ever came home to a genuine, full-blown red carpet welcome back to American soil.

Pomilia was among troops who returned from the Iraqi Freedom AOR last Friday evening. "I've come back when the wing commander or squadron commander would be there to shake your hand. But then you would go and do your paperwork. I never had a welcome home like this," Pomilia said.

Pomilia received the Westover welcome here, complete with hamburgers, music, flags and USO treats. "It was definitely unexpected. I was shocked, to say the least. It was very nice," he said.

He was among members of the 187th Fighter Wing who returned from supporting F-16 operations from a desert base. For the

munitions specialist, the three months in the desert was the latest in a long string of deployments.

He served nine years on active duty, during which he served at Diego Garcia during Desert Storm; Mogadishu, Somalia in 1993, then after two weeks at home he went to Brindisi, Italy in support of Bosnian operations; back to Somalia in 1994; Haiti, and Somalia again in 1995.

Pomilia also served a year in Iceland, where he saw it snow on June 26. That didn't amaze him as much as snow in the desert. He that one night in March it was cold enough at his desert base for light snow flurries.

"You had to look carefully, but it was definitely snow flurries. The cold was unbelievable. We wrapped our heads in our desert scarves and we wore our flak vests for warmth," he said.

Party for Lt. Col. Carey

The 42nd Aerial Port Squadron invites Westover people to honor squadron commander Lt. Col. James P. Carey in his retirement. The retirement party will be held on June 7 at Heidi's Restaurant in South Hadley.

Dinner will be served from 6-7 p.m. followed by presentations from 7:30-9 p.m. Dancing will conclude the party from 9 p.m. to midnight. Cost is \$15 per person and attire is business casual. Those people interested in attending the party should RSVP by June 2 to Maj. James Finneran or Thomas Clark at Ext. 3276.

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003
5,364 passengers --- 1,890 aircraft
19,708,923 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

Meals
11,199 hot meals served
Box lunches: 4,652
Info from MSgt. David Beauregard, 439SVS

Fuel since Feb. 1
12,325,246 gallons of JP-8
Info from Jim Maloney, Fuels

Hand sewn American flag says thanks from students

A class of Ware school children gave the Patriot Wing a big red, white and blue "Thank You!" recently.

The youngster's hand sewed a three by five foot American flag and presented it to the men and women of Westover with a card expressing thanks for all we do. The flag is in a glass and wood frame, with the thank you card, in the Wing Headquarters Building.

Old Glory was sewn by kindergartners through third graders of Stanley M. Koziol Elementary School of Ware. They belong to the 21st Century Community Learning Center Sew Easy Sewing Club of Diane Feltner, wife of SMSgt. Bill Feltner, a 439th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron expeditor and hydraulics specialist.

The 17 children of the after school program worked on the flag two days a week for six weeks as a gift for the Patriot Wing.

Express-ions

